

## Chapter X - Dinah Visits Lisbeth

AT five o'clock Lisbeth came downstairs with a large key in her hand: it was the key of the chamber where her husband lay dead. Throughout the day, except in her occasional outbursts of wailing grief, she had been in incessant movement, performing the initial duties to her dead with the awe and exactitude that belong to religious rites. She had brought out her little store of bleached linen, which she had for long years kept in reserve for this supreme use. It seemed but yesterday - that time so many midsummers ago, when she had told Thias where this linen lay, that he might be sure and reach it out for her when SHE died, for she was the elder of the two. Then there had been the work of cleansing to the strictest purity every object in the sacred chamber, and of removing from it every trace of common daily occupation. The small window, which had hitherto freely let in the frosty moonlight or the warm summer sunrise on the working man's slumber, must now be darkened with a fair white sheet, for this was the sleep which is as sacred under the bare rafters as in ceiled houses. Lisbeth had even mended a long-neglected and unnoticeable rent in the checkered bit of bed-curtain; for the moments were few and precious now in which she would be able to do the smallest office of respect or love for the still corpse, to which in all her thoughts she attributed some consciousness. Our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them: they can be injured by us, they can be wounded; they know all our penitence, all our aching sense that their place is empty, all the kisses we bestow on the smallest relic of their presence. And the aged peasant woman most of all believes that her dead are conscious. Decent burial was what Lisbeth had been thinking of for herself through years of thrift, with an indistinct expectation that she should know when she was being carried to the churchyard, followed by her husband and her sons; and now she felt as if the greatest work of her life were to be done in seeing that Thias was buried decently before her - under the white thorn, where once, in a dream, she had thought she lay in the coffin, yet all the while saw the sunshine above and smelt the white blossoms that were so thick upon the thorn the Sunday she went to be churched after Adam was born.

But now she had done everything that could be done to-day in the chamber of death - had done it all herself, with some aid from her sons in lifting, for she would let no one be fetched to help her from the village, not being fond of female neighbours generally; and her favourite Dolly, the old housekeeper at Mr Burge's, who had come to condole with her in the morning as soon as she heard of Thias's death, was too dim-sighted to be of much use. She had locked the door, and now held the key in her hand, as she threw herself wearily into a chair that stood out of its place in the middle of the house floor, where in ordinary times she would never have consented to sit. The

kitchen had had none of her attention that day; it was soiled with the tread of muddy shoes and untidy with clothes and other objects out of place. But what at another time would have been intolerable to Lisbeth's habits of order and cleanliness seemed to her now just what should be: it was right that things should look strange and disordered and wretched, now the old man had come to his end in that sad way; the kitchen ought not to look as if nothing had happened. Adam, overcome with the agitations and exertions of the day after his night of hard work, had fallen asleep on a bench in the workshop; and Seth was in the back kitchen making a fire of sticks that he might get the kettle to boil, and persuade his mother to have a cup of tea, an indulgence which she rarely allowed herself.

There was no one in the kitchen when Lisbeth entered and threw herself into the chair. She looked round with blank eyes at the dirt and confusion on which the bright afternoon's sun shone dimly; it was all of a piece with the sad confusion of her mind - that confusion which belongs to the first hours of a sudden sorrow, when the poor human soul is like one who has been deposited sleeping among the ruins of a vast city, and wakes up in dreary amazement, not knowing whether it is the growing or the dying day - not knowing why and whence came this illimitable scene of desolation, or why he too finds himself desolate in the midst of it.

At another time Lisbeth's first thought would have been, 'Where is Adam?' but the sudden death of her husband had restored him in these hours to that first place in her affections which he had held six-and-twenty years ago. She had forgotten his faults as we forget the sorrows of our departed childhood, and thought of nothing but the young husband's kindness and the old man's patience. Her eyes continued to wander blankly until Seth came in and began to remove some of the scattered things, and clear the small round deal table that he might set out his mother's tea upon it.

'What art goin' to do?' she said, rather peevishly.

'I want thee to have a cup of tea, Mother,' answered Seth, tenderly. 'It'll do thee good; and I'll put two or three of these things away, and make the house look more comfortable.'

'Comfortable! How canst talk o' ma'in' things comfortable? Let a-be, let a-be. There's no comfort for me no more,' she went on, the tears coming when she began to speak, 'now thy poor feyther's gone, as I'n washed for and mended, an' got's victual for him for thirty 'ear, an' him allays so pleased wi' iverything I done for him, an' used to be so handy an' do the jobs for me when I war ill an' cumbered wi' th' babby, an' made me the posset an' brought it upstairs as proud as could be, an' carried the lad as war as heavy as two children for five

mile an' ne'er grumbled, all the way to Warson Wake, 'cause I wanted to go an' see my sister, as war dead an' gone the very next Christmas as e'er come. An' him to be drowned in the brook as we passed o'er the day we war married an' come home together, an' he'd made them lots o' shelves for me to put my plates an' things on, an' showed 'em me as proud as could be, 'cause he know'd I should be pleased. An' he war to die an' me not to know, but to be a-sleepin' i' my bed, as if I caredna nought about it. Eh! An' me to live to see that! An' us as war young folks once, an' thought we should do rarely when we war married. Let a-be, lad, let a-be! I wanna ha' no tay. I carena if I ne'er ate nor drink no more. When one end o' th' bridge tumbles down, where's th' use o' th' other stannin'? I may's well die, an' foller my old man. There's no knowin' but he'll want me.'

Here Lisbeth broke from words into moans, swaying herself backwards and forwards on her chair. Seth, always timid in his behaviour towards his mother, from the sense that he had no influence over her, felt it was useless to attempt to persuade or soothe her till this passion was past; so he contented himself with tending the back kitchen fire and folding up his father's clothes, which had been hanging out to dry since morning - afraid to move about in the room where his mother was, lest he should irritate her further.

But after Lisbeth had been rocking herself and moaning for some minutes, she suddenly paused and said aloud to herself, 'I'll go an' see arter Adam, for I canna think where he's gotten; an' I want him to go upstairs wi' me afore it's dark, for the minutes to look at the corpse is like the meltin' snow.'

Seth overheard this, and coming into the kitchen again, as his mother rose from her chair, he said, 'Adam's asleep in the workshop, mother. Thee'dst better not wake him. He was o'erwrought with work and trouble.'

'Wake him? Who's a-goin' to wake him? I shanna wake him wi' lookin' at him. I hanna seen the lad this two hour - I'd welly forgot as he'd e'er growed up from a babby when's feyther carried him.'

Adam was seated on a rough bench, his head supported by his arm, which rested from the shoulder to the elbow on the long planing-table in the middle of the workshop. It seemed as if he had sat down for a few minutes' rest and had fallen asleep without slipping from his first attitude of sad, fatigued thought. His face, unwashed since yesterday, looked pallid and clammy; his hair was tossed shaggily about his forehead, and his closed eyes had the sunken look which follows upon watching and sorrow. His brow was knit, and his whole face had an expression of weariness and pain. Gyp was evidently uneasy, for he sat on his haunches, resting his nose on his master's stretched-out

leg, and dividing the time between licking the hand that hung listlessly down and glancing with a listening air towards the door. The poor dog was hungry and restless, but would not leave his master, and was waiting impatiently for some change in the scene. It was owing to this feeling on Gyp's part that, when Lisbeth came into the workshop and advanced towards Adam as noiselessly as she could, her intention not to awaken him was immediately defeated; for Gyp's excitement was too great to find vent in anything short of a sharp bark, and in a moment Adam opened his eyes and saw his mother standing before him. It was not very unlike his dream, for his sleep had been little more than living through again, in a fevered delirious way, all that had happened since daybreak, and his mother with her fretful grief was present to him through it all. The chief difference between the reality and the vision was that in his dream Hetty was continually coming before him in bodily presence - strangely mingling herself as an actor in scenes with which she had nothing to do. She was even by the Willow Brook; she made his mother angry by coming into the house; and he met her with her smart clothes quite wet through, as he walked in the rain to Treddleston, to tell the coroner. But wherever Hetty came, his mother was sure to follow soon; and when he opened his eyes, it was not at all startling to see her standing near him.

'Eh, my lad, my lad!' Lisbeth burst out immediately, her wailing impulse returning, for grief in its freshness feels the need of associating its loss and its lament with every change of scene and incident, 'thee'st got nobody now but thy old mother to torment thee and be a burden to thee. Thy poor feyther 'ull ne'er anger thee no more; an' thy mother may's well go arter him - the sooner the better - for I'm no good to nobody now. One old coat 'ull do to patch another, but it's good for nought else. Thee'dst like to ha' a wife to mend thy clothes an' get thy victual, better nor thy old mother. An' I shall be nought but cumber, a-sittin' i' th' chimney-corner. (Adam winced and moved uneasily; he dreaded, of all things, to hear his mother speak of Hetty.) But if thy feyther had lived, he'd ne'er ha' wanted me to go to make room for another, for he could no more ha' done wi'out me nor one side o' the scissars can do wi'out th' other. Eh, we should ha' been both flung away together, an' then I shouldna ha' seen this day, an' one buryin' 'ud ha' done for us both.'

Here Lisbeth paused, but Adam sat in pained silence - he could not speak otherwise than tenderly to his mother to-day, but he could not help being irritated by this plaint. It was not possible for poor Lisbeth to know how it affected Adam any more than it is possible for a wounded dog to know how his moans affect the nerves of his master. Like all complaining women, she complained in the expectation of being soothed, and when Adam said nothing, she was only prompted to complain more bitterly.

'I know thee couldst do better wi'out me, for thee couldst go where thee likedst an' marry them as thee likedst. But I donna want to say thee nay, let thee bring home who thee wut; I'd ne'er open my lips to find faut, for when folks is old an' o' no use, they may think theirsens well off to get the bit an' the sup, though they'n to swallow ill words wi't. An' if thee'st set thy heart on a lass as'll bring thee nought and waste all, when thee mightst ha' them as 'ud make a man on thee, I'll say nought, now thy feyther's dead an' drowned, for I'm no better nor an old haft when the blade's gone.'

Adam, unable to bear this any longer, rose silently from the bench and walked out of the workshop into the kitchen. But Lisbeth followed him.

'Thee wutna go upstairs an' see thy feyther then? I'n done everythin' now, an' he'd like thee to go an' look at him, for he war allays so pleased when thee wast mild to him.'

Adam turned round at once and said, 'Yes, mother; let us go upstairs. Come, Seth, let us go together.'

They went upstairs, and for five minutes all was silence. Then the key was turned again, and there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. But Adam did not come down again; he was too weary and worn-out to encounter more of his mother's querulous grief, and he went to rest on his bed. Lisbeth no sooner entered the kitchen and sat down than she threw her apron over her head, and began to cry and moan and rock herself as before. Seth thought, 'She will be quieter by and by, now we have been upstairs'; and he went into the back kitchen again, to tend his little fire, hoping that he should presently induce her to have some tea.

Lisbeth had been rocking herself in this way for more than five minutes, giving a low moan with every forward movement of her body, when she suddenly felt a hand placed gently on hers, and a sweet treble voice said to her, 'Dear sister, the Lord has sent me to see if I can be a comfort to you.'

Lisbeth paused, in a listening attitude, without removing her apron from her face. The voice was strange to her. Could it be her sister's spirit come back to her from the dead after all those years? She trembled and dared not look.

Dinah, believing that this pause of wonder was in itself a relief for the sorrowing woman, said no more just yet, but quietly took off her bonnet, and then, motioning silence to Seth, who, on hearing her voice, had come in with a beating heart, laid one hand on the back of

Lisbeth's chair and leaned over her, that she might be aware of a friendly presence.

Slowly Lisbeth drew down her apron, and timidly she opened her dim dark eyes. She saw nothing at first but a face - a pure, pale face, with loving grey eyes, and it was quite unknown to her. Her wonder increased; perhaps it WAS an angel. But in the same instant Dinah had laid her hand on Lisbeth's again, and the old woman looked down at it. It was a much smaller hand than her own, but it was not white and delicate, for Dinah had never worn a glove in her life, and her hand bore the traces of labour from her childhood upwards. Lisbeth looked earnestly at the hand for a moment, and then, fixing her eyes again on Dinah's face, said, with something of restored courage, but in a tone of surprise, 'Why, ye're a workin' woman!'

'Yes, I am Dinah Morris, and I work in the cotton-mill when I am at home.'

'Ah!' said Lisbeth slowly, still wondering; 'ye comed in so light, like the shadow on the wall, an' spoke i' my ear, as I thought ye might be a sperrit. Ye've got a'most the face o' one as is a-sittin' on the grave i' Adam's new Bible.'

'I come from the Hall Farm now. You know Mrs. Poyser - she's my aunt, and she has heard of your great affliction, and is very sorry; and I'm come to see if I can be any help to you in your trouble; for I know your sons Adam and Seth, and I know you have no daughter; and when the clergyman told me how the hand of God was heavy upon you, my heart went out towards you, and I felt a command to come and be to you in the place of a daughter in this grief, if you will let me.'

'Ah! I know who y' are now; y' are a Methody, like Seth; he's tould me on you,' said Lisbeth fretfully, her overpowering sense of pain returning, now her wonder was gone. 'Ye'll make it out as trouble's a good thing, like HE allays does. But where's the use o' talkin' to me a-that'n? Ye canna make the smart less wi' talkin'. Ye'll ne'er make me believe as it's better for me not to ha' my old man die in's bed, if he must die, an' ha' the parson to pray by him, an' me to sit by him, an' tell him ne'er to mind th' ill words I've gi'en him sometimes when I war angered, an' to gi' him a bit an' a sup, as long as a bit an' a sup he'd swallow. But eh! To die i' the cold water, an' us close to him, an' ne'er to know; an' me a-sleepin', as if I ne'er belonged to him no more nor if he'd been a journeyman tramp from nobody knows where!'

Here Lisbeth began to cry and rock herself again; and Dinah said, 'Yes, dear friend, your affliction is great. It would be hardness of heart to say that your trouble was not heavy to bear. God didn't send me to

you to make light of your sorrow, but to mourn with you, if you will let me. If you had a table spread for a feast, and was making merry with your friends, you would think it was kind to let me come and sit down and rejoice with you, because you'd think I should like to share those good things; but I should like better to share in your trouble and your labour, and it would seem harder to me if you denied me that. You won't send me away? You're not angry with me for coming?'

'Nay, nay; angered! who said I war angered? It war good on you to come. An' Seth, why donna ye get her some tay? Ye war in a hurry to get some for me, as had no need, but ye donna think o' gettin' 't for them as wants it. Sit ye down; sit ye down. I thank you kindly for comin', for it's little wage ye get by walkin' through the wet fields to see an old woman like me....Nay, I'n got no daughter o' my own - ne'er had one - an' I warna sorry, for they're poor queechy things, gells is; I allays wanted to ha' lads, as could fend for theirsens. An' the lads 'ull be marryin' - I shall ha' daughters eno', an' too many. But now, do ye make the tay as ye like it, for I'n got no taste i' my mouth this day - it's all one what I swaller - it's all got the taste o' sorrow wi't.'

Dinah took care not to betray that she had had her tea, and accepted Lisbeth's invitation very readily, for the sake of persuading the old woman herself to take the food and drink she so much needed after a day of hard work and fasting.

Seth was so happy now Dinah was in the house that he could not help thinking her presence was worth purchasing with a life in which grief incessantly followed upon grief; but the next moment he reproached himself - it was almost as if he were rejoicing in his father's sad death. Nevertheless the joy of being with Dinah WOULD triumph - it was like the influence of climate, which no resistance can overcome. And the feeling even suffused itself over his face so as to attract his mother's notice, while she was drinking her tea.

'Thee may'st well talk o' trouble bein' a good thing, Seth, for thee thriv'st on't. Thee look'st as if thee know'dst no more o' care an' cumber nor when thee wast a babby a-lyin' awake i' th' cradle. For thee'dst allays lie still wi' thy eyes open, an' Adam ne'er 'ud lie still a minute when he wakened. Thee wast allays like a bag o' meal as can ne'er be bruised - though, for the matter o' that, thy poor feyther war just such another. But ye've got the same look too' (here Lisbeth turned to Dinah). 'I reckon it's wi' bein' a Methody. Not as I'm a-findin' faut wi' ye for't, for ye've no call to be frettin', an' somehow ye looken sorry too. Eh! Well, if the Methodies are fond o' trouble, they're like to thrive: it's a pity they canna ha't all, an' take it away from them as donna like it. I could ha' gi'en 'em plenty; for when I'd gotten my old man I war worreted from morn till night; and now he's gone, I'd be glad for the worst o'er again.'

'Yes,' said Dinah, careful not to oppose any feeling of Lisbeth's, for her reliance, in her smallest words and deeds, on a divine guidance, always issued in that finest woman's tact which proceeds from acute and ready sympathy; 'yes, I remember too, when my dear aunt died, I longed for the sound of her bad cough in the nights, instead of the silence that came when she was gone. But now, dear friend, drink this other cup of tea and eat a little more.'

'What!' said Lisbeth, taking the cup and speaking in a less querulous tone, 'had ye got no feyther and mother, then, as ye war so sorry about your aunt?'

'No, I never knew a father or mother; my aunt brought me up from a baby. She had no children, for she was never married and she brought me up as tenderly as if I'd been her own child.'

'Eh, she'd fine work wi' ye, I'll warrant, bringin' ye up from a babby, an' her a lone woman - it's ill bringin' up a cade lamb. But I daresay ye warnna franzy, for ye look as if ye'd ne'er been angered i' your life. But what did ye do when your aunt died, an' why didna ye come to live in this country, bein' as Mrs. Poyser's your aunt too?'

Dinah, seeing that Lisbeth's attention was attracted, told her the story of her early life - how she had been brought up to work hard, and what sort of place Snowfield was, and how many people had a hard life there - all the details that she thought likely to interest Lisbeth. The old woman listened, and forgot to be fretful, unconsciously subject to the soothing influence of Dinah's face and voice. After a while she was persuaded to let the kitchen be made tidy; for Dinah was bent on this, believing that the sense of order and quietude around her would help in disposing Lisbeth to join in the prayer she longed to pour forth at her side. Seth, meanwhile, went out to chop wood, for he surmised that Dinah would like to be left alone with his mother.

Lisbeth sat watching her as she moved about in her still quick way, and said at last, 'Ye've got a notion o' cleanin' up. I wouldna mind ha'in ye for a daughter, for ye wouldna spend the lad's wage i' fine clothes an' waste. Ye're not like the lasses o' this countryside. I reckon folks is different at Snowfield from what they are here.'

'They have a different sort of life, many of 'em,' said Dinah; 'they work at different things - some in the mill, and many in the mines, in the villages round about. But the heart of man is the same everywhere, and there are the children of this world and the children of light there as well as elsewhere. But we've many more Methodists there than in this country.'



'Well, I didna know as the Methody women war like ye, for there's Will Maskery's wife, as they say's a big Methody, isna pleasant to look at, at all. I'd as lief look at a toad. An' I'm thinkin' I wouldna mind if ye'd stay an' sleep here, for I should like to see ye i' th' house i' th' mornin'. But mayhappen they'll be lookin for ye at Mester Poyser's.'

'No,' said Dinah, 'they don't expect me, and I should like to stay, if you'll let me.'

'Well, there's room; I'n got my bed laid i' th' little room o'er the back kitchen, an' ye can lie beside me. I'd be glad to ha' ye wi' me to speak to i' th' night, for ye've got a nice way o' talkin'. It puts me i' mind o' the swallows as was under the thack last 'ear when they fust begun to sing low an' soft-like i' th' mornin'. Eh, but my old man war fond o' them birds! An' so war Adam, but they'n ne'er comed again this 'ear. Happen THEY'RE dead too.'

'There,' said Dinah, 'now the kitchen looks tidy, and now, dear Mother - for I'm your daughter to-night, you know - I should like you to wash your face and have a clean cap on. Do you remember what David did, when God took away his child from him? While the child was yet alive he fasted and prayed to God to spare it, and he would neither eat nor drink, but lay on the ground all night, beseeching God for the child. But when he knew it was dead, he rose up from the ground and washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes, and ate and drank; and when they asked him how it was that he seemed to have left off grieving now the child was dead, he said, 'While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'

'Eh, that's a true word,' said Lisbeth. 'Yea, my old man wanna come back to me, but I shall go to him - the sooner the better. Well, ye may do as ye like wi' me: there's a clean cap i' that drawer, an' I'll go i' the back kitchen an' wash my face. An' Seth, thee may'st reach down Adam's new Bible wi' th' picters in, an' she shall read us a chapter. Eh, I like them words - 'I shall go to him, but he wanna come back to me.'

Dinah and Seth were both inwardly offering thanks for the greater quietness of spirit that had come over Lisbeth. This was what Dinah had been trying to bring about, through all her still sympathy and absence from exhortation. From her girlhood upwards she had had experience among the sick and the mourning, among minds hardened and shrivelled through poverty and ignorance, and had gained the subtlest perception of the mode in which they could best be touched and softened into willingness to receive words of spiritual consolation

or warning. As Dinah expressed it, 'she was never left to herself; but it was always given her when to keep silence and when to speak.' And do we not all agree to call rapid thought and noble impulse by the name of inspiration? After our subtlest analysis of the mental process, we must still say, as Dinah did, that our highest thoughts and our best deeds are all given to us.

And so there was earnest prayer - there was faith, love, and hope pouring forth that evening in the little kitchen. And poor, aged, fretful Lisbeth, without grasping any distinct idea, without going through any course of religious emotions, felt a vague sense of goodness and love, and of something right lying underneath and beyond all this sorrowing life. She couldn't understand the sorrow; but, for these moments, under the subduing influence of Dinah's spirit, she felt that she must be patient and still.